



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF PALM BEACH COUNTY

INTO THE WILD- SUMMER 2021

Activity Guide

Weekly Theme:

Field trip for the week:

Date of activity:

Grades:

Activity objective: What will the members learn or experience?

Materials needed:

Community Builder:

Main Activity:

Recognition and Reflection:



12 MANATEE FACTS YOU MAY NOT KNOW

Do you know what manatees eat or how fast they can swim? Learn all about manatees with these 12 surprising facts and details.

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Manatees are a truly unique species to observe and we are lucky to have these gentle giants swimming through our waterways in Citrus County, Florida. Learn more about one of the world's most majestic sea creatures with these twelve interesting manatee facts below:



1. We're The Manatee Capital of The World

Citrus County is known as the “Manatee Capital of the World,” and it is one of the only places in Florida where you can **swim with manatees** (<https://www.discovercrystalriverfl.com/blog/manatee-guide/>)! Our local guides are knowledgeable about how to respectfully and carefully share the water with these inspiring creatures.

2. There Are Three Different Species

There are three main species of manatees, including West Indian, West African, and Amazonian. The manatees found in Florida’s waterways are West Indian.

3. Manatees Love Warm Water

Manatees cannot survive in water temperatures below 60 degrees, that is why they migrate from the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico to natural springs in Florida during the winter months.



4. Manatees Are Known As “Sea Cows”

Manatees are also known as “Sea Cows” because they move slowly, are very peaceful, eat only plants, and their babies are called “calves.”

5. Manatees Descended from Land Mammals

Manatees are thought to have evolved from four-legged mammals. Their closest relatives are actually elephants!

6. Manatees Are As Heavy As A Grand Piano

Grand pianos weigh-in at about 900 pounds and by comparison, manatees weigh between 800 and 1,200 pounds. At birth, manatees weigh around 66 pounds.

7. Is It A Manatee or Mermaid?

The idea of a half-human half-sea creature had been circulating for thousands of years among ancient civilizations. When sailing to North America, Christopher Columbus is reported to have seen a female form in the water. He thought it was a mermaid, but in reality, it was a manatee surfacing.

8. Manatees Like to Eat!

Manatees eat about 10 to 15 percent of their body weight each day. It takes them about 7 hours per day to graze on food.

9. Manatees Only Breathe Every Few Minutes

These creatures are very solitary and spend about half of their day sleeping submerged. When resting, they only come up for air about every 20 minutes. When active, they will surface for air every three to five minutes. A manatee's single breath can replace up to 90 percent of the air in its lungs. By comparison, one breath will only replace about 10 percent of the air in a human's lungs.

10. Manatees Are Slow Movers

Manatees generally swim at a rate of 3 to 5 mph. By comparison, a Roomba vacuum cleaner tops out at speeds of 3.8 mph. Manatees can use their tails to swim in bursts of up to 15 mph too.

11. Manatees Are Protected By Law

There are fewer than 6,000 manatees in the world. In 2016, due to improvements in their population health, manatees were updated from "endangered" to "threatened." Manatees are protected from being hunted or captured by U.S. law.

12. Manatees Communicate With Each Other

Manatees communicate using clicks, chirps, squeaks, squeals, and screams that are audible to humans. Even though they are known as "sea cows," they do not moo.

If you'd like to meet and learn more about manatees while you're here, then check out our [guide to swimming with manatees in Crystal River](https://www.discovercrystalriverfl.com/blog/manatee-guide/) (<https://www.discovercrystalriverfl.com/blog/manatee-guide/>). There are so many [fun things to do](https://www.discovercrystalriverfl.com/things-to-do/) (<https://www.discovercrystalriverfl.com/things-to-do/>) in Citrus County, so start planning your getaway with us today!

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Author



DISCOVER CRYSTAL RIVER

Official Guide to Crystal River in Citrus
County, Florida

<https://www.facebook.com/DiscoverCR> <http://www.discovercr.com>

What You “Otter” Know About Florida’s Slinky River Creatures

“Cute” Isn’t the Right Word



an Unexpected Land-Sighting

We are camping in the south of Florida, a beautiful campground called Torry Island, located at the bottom edge of Lake Okeechobee, an area comprised of canals and marshes filled with birds, fish, and wildlife of all kinds.

A two-mile walking path rings the area and wanders around a little man-made lake and then down a wide grassy path between two canals. It’s quiet, isolated, and filled with surprises.

One morning shortly after we arrived, I was taking a long walk when, just twenty feet in front of me, a curly black creature emerged from the brush at the side of the canal and loped across the path in a weird humping motion. It was like watching a giant furry caterpillar traveling at warp speed, making rolling, mound-shaped movements with its flexible body.

As soon as I ran into another hiker, I asked what I had seen. Was it a mink? A weasel?

“Nope. It was just a river otter. You see them everywhere here.”



Here, There, and Everywhere

River otters are found in every part of Florida except the Keys. In fact, river otters are found almost everywhere in North America except in hot, desert areas. Otters are water creatures. All they need to survive is a wet habitat with available food.

Otters were once a staple of the French fur trade, and at one time had been hunted to near extinction in twenty states. Expanding population and pollution also took a toll on them. To preserve the species, twenty-one states reintroduced otters, many of them in the Rocky Mountain area. By 2016, more than 4000 river otters had been translocated to 23 states, in "one of the most ambitious and extensive carnivore restorations in history."

Today, thanks to careful management, and harvesting that includes legal trapping in 40 states, the river otters now inhabit 90% of their original territory, and no state has reported any decline in the otter population.



What Happens When They’re Everywhere

As the number of otters has increased, so has the number of conflicts with the human population.

Since otters travel in groups of nine or more, they can make a mess. Some areas report a decrease in fish in ponds and hatcheries. Others have expressed health concerns since groups of otters routinely climb onto docks, boats, and shorefront property where they defecate and vomit.

Don’t Let Their “Cuteness” Fool You

They’re beautiful in a sleek, aerodynamic way. Short legs, long-bodies covered with a thick, brown-black oiled fur, river otters have clear eye-lids so they can see underwater when they swim. They can close their small, close-set ears and their nostrils, allowing them to stay underwater for 8 minutes while diving up to 60 feet deep.

The size of river otters ranges between three and four feet long and up to thirty pounds, with the males being bigger than the females.

No wonder I was amazed at the speed of the otter I saw curling across the path. Otters can move at a speed of 18 miles per hour on land, They often range over a large territory, requiring them to cross roads to get to the next waterway, and sadly, resulting in roadkill. You might even say otters are “cute” — until you learn about their fierce and predatory behavior.

Fierce Warriors Worthy of Fear

Never get close to a river otter. They usually shy away from humans and are most active at night, so the chance you'd come face-to-face with an otter is slim. However, river otters have been known to attack kayakers.

In March of 2018, in Manatee County, Florida, four kayakers were wounded in separate otter attacks. In one case, an otter jumped onto a woman's kayak and lunged at her face. Officials from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission were on the lookout for an "aggressive" otter.

Otters have also been known to attack dogs — or at least, crazy otters have. One account told of an otter getting into a Lakeland, Florida home and attacking a 17-year-old girl and the family dog.

Another account tells of a five-pound dog that was killed when three otters came onto a residential swimming pool deck in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Otter attacks are rare, but they do happen.

Otters Can Take Down Gators

Otters are small but mighty, capable of taking down alligators as big as five feet long. To slay a gator is no little feat, but National Geographic has seen it happen multiple times.

An otter learns the gator-slaying-behavior from its mother and kin. The tactic requires that the otter stays out of the gator's side-to-side strike zone by climbing on its back and sinking its sharp little teeth into the alligator's hide.

Since alligator skin is tough, the otter can't really kill the gator by biting. But what happens is that the alligator is capable only of short bursts of strength. The otter, however, is an endurance fighter and can sustain attack energy for long periods of time. The gator gives out with fatigue; his muscles fill with lactic acid, inducing a lethargic state. The otter hangs on until the gator is limp and then hauls him to shore, where he tears through the hide and digs out the meat. The alligator dies from lactic acid poisoning while the otter is feasting on his flesh.



Vicious Giant Otter Killed and Ate a Crocodile: Photo: Imgur

An otter's diet typically consists of fish, but they are not picky eaters. They also eat rodents, reptiles, crayfish, bugs, frogs, turtles, raccoons, beavers, and alligators.

Both Social and Independent

Otters are adaptable creatures. They are social animals, enjoying the company of other otters, but they are also capable of being alone, often hunting by themselves. The playtime of otters is famous for its rambunctious, joyful nature.

Richard Bach, the author of *Jonathon Livingston Seagull*, once said,

"We [Americans] are game-playing, fun-loving creatures; we are the otters of the universe."

He's probably right. But not only are **we** game-playing, fun-loving creatures, we are also cute and sociable, and, sadly, like the river otters of Southern Florida, we are capable of occasional violent, vicious attacks.